

A 7427

S E R M O N

P R E A C H ' D A T

C H R I S T - C H U R C H

O N

Sunday the 3d of November, 1745.

By GABRIEL JAMES MATURIN, D. D.
Dean of *Kildare*, and Chaplain to his
GRACE the Archbishop of *Dublin*.

D U B L I N :

Printed by S. POWELL,

MDCCXLV.





A
S E R M O N.

ISAIAH xliii. 21.

I have formed this People for myself, they shall shew forth my Praise.

THERE appears in the History of the Jews, independently of the miraculous Interposition of the Deity, so regular a Dispensation of Events, for the Preservation of a People, on every Side surrounded by potent and inveterate Enemies, that he certainly does not want Credulity, who can consider the exact Concurrence of so many particular Events to one invariable End, as entirely casual and undirected.

A 2

Single

Single Incidents, how extraordinary soever, may be ascribed without Absurdity to the Agency of second Causes : These Causes sometimes must produce Effects amazing in themselves, and in their Consequences of considerable Influence on the Welfare of whole Nations ; but in a long Succession of such Incidents, tending all of them to the Preservation of one People, and critically adapted to every new Circumstance of their Distress, not to perceive Intention and Design, is indeed the very Height of Prejudice.

To this Purpose the holy Writer argues in the Text ; and in the bold figurative Style of Prophecy, introduces God himself appealing to the constant and distinguished Protection of the Jews, as to a standing Instance of his Providence, an unanswerable Proof of his own immediate Interposition in the Disposál of Events. And indeed, all Distinction ceaseth between Casualties and Accidents on the one Hand, and the regular Effects of Prudence and Design on the other, if it be not true of signal and repeated Favours, of Deliverances constantly and wonderfully wrought in the Extremity of Danger, that in the Dispensation of them Wisdom has presided.—They therefore, in the *Prophet's emphatical Expression*, eminently

nently *shew forth God's Praise*; remind Men irresistibly of that superior Power, which directs secondary Agents, and makes their Designs subservient to the Execution of his own.

Did Events of this remarkable Kind never happen, we should be apt to ascribe to second Causes, to their own undirected Agency, whatever good, or evil might befall us in the several Changes and various Chances of this Life. Under this Persuasion, the Sense of our Dependence upon God visibly declines; it is therefore of great Service to Religion, that Instances there should be of distinguished and particular Protection. And this Truth the Prophet has expressed *in the former Part of the Words* before us, *This People I formed for myself.*

It is true indeed, that the Wisdom is as great, and the Goodness essentially the same, which by stated Laws direct second Causes to their Ends, in common and ordinary Cases; but they are not so conspicuous, as when they shew themselves distinctly in sudden and unexpected Revolutions. When the Race is to the swift, and the Battle to the strong, it is far from an Objection to God's Providence: It is wise, it is fit, it is necessary, that such Regula-

tions should take Place in the common Occurrences of Life. Without them, human Powers were, strictly speaking, useless : To exert them to any Purpose, we must, in general, be assured of their Effects, and in some Degree confident of their Success. It is however true, when this natural Order is inverted, when these general Laws at a critical Juncture are suspended, when the Race is to the slow, and the Battle, by some secret Influence, to the weak, that we then more explicitly acknowledge a supreme Director of Events, and more distinctly feel that he does, whatsoever it shall please him, either in Heaven, or in Earth.

To be more affected by Deviations from the Rule, than by the Wisdom of the Rule itself, is a Disposition in the Mind, which, I am sensible, has been often censured as an unreasonable Fondness for things extraordinary and uncommon. Be it so ; it is not however the first Instance of God's Compliance with our Weaknesses. He does, and it certainly becomes the Indulgence of our heavenly Father so to do, He does frequently condescend to accommodate his Conduct to our Conceptions, and to humour our innocent Infirmities : But perhaps the Censure is itself a
rash

rash one, and injuriously supposes that to deviate from general Laws by particular Exceptions, is in any Measure inconsistent with Wisdom, Elegance, or Order. The Interposition of the Deity is in extraordinary Events undoubtedly more conspicuous—seems more appropriated and more precise—implies Attention to our Wants, concern for our Welfare, Watchfulness, Tenderness, and Care in a more eminent Degree.—And if it be, besides, as consonant to Wisdom, I can perceive no Reason, why it should not be more observed, since it is allowedly more observable. I am afraid, in the Notions of some Writers upon Providence, the essential Difference between Mechanism and Government is not sufficiently attended to: They estimate Excellencies, and Defects in both unwarily by the same Measure, and substitute to one another Ideas totally distinct. It is essential to the Perfection of Machines, to act always in one Way, regularly, and without Assistance; and that Artist is most deservedly esteemed, whose Attendance is no longer wanted, when his Work is once compleated: But was a moral Governour to act on the same Grounds, to proceed by invariable Laws in the Management of variable Events, and withdraw himself, and

his Inspection; the Result would readily convince us, that he had palpably misunderstood his Province. Machines may be regulated in this Way; but free Agents cannot so be governed. The constant Inspection, and upon some Occasions, the immediate Interposition of Providence, are Ideas inseparably connected with the moral Government of Mankind. To confine it's Action to the bare Preservation of their Powers, and to suppose Events in every Case determined by the free Agency of Men, and the natural Play of second Causes, is excluding it in other Words. A Government without Effect or Influence, is visibly equivalent to none; and if God never interferes, Providence is but an empty Name, and things are perfectly alike, either with it, or without it. Supposing Men once created with the Faculties and Powers which they hold from God's Munificence, and that beautiful Relation between Causes and Effects, which subsists at present, instituted once for all; it is too evident to be disputed, that, without particular Interpositions, Providence is but another Word for Preservation, and that we mean no more by ascribing the Guidance and Direction of this lower World to it's Author, than merely that he supports it

it. I own, I conceive more highly of God's Government. The Designs of Agents, free at the same Time that they are fallible, are sometimes of such Importance, so extensive in their Influence, and so destructive in their Tendency, that they seem to me worthy of his Attention. I cannot think it inconsistent with his Majesty, I am sure it is not with his Goodness, to prevent the Execution of them, and by Means always in his Power to disappoint Attempts, which He certainly does not approve.

That God conceals his Action under seeming Accidents and Casualties, and interferes not always to defend the Virtuous against Violence, has indeed been urged as an Objection; but in effect is none. If God ever intervenes, it must be under these very Limitations; neither constantly, nor yet avowedly: It would destroy Mens Liberty, remove all consistent Notions of Merit and Demerit, leave no Temptations to Vice, no Trials of any Kind to Virtue, were the former always unsuccessful, and the latter openly, and miraculously protected. That Instances there should be to support a rational Persuasion of his Inspection over us, is undoubtedly of Service to Religion; and of such Events it is true, in the Expression

pression of the Text, that *they shew forth his Glory* ; that to attentive and unprejudiced Observers, they are convincing Indications of an over-ruling Providence : but more than this—an open and avowed Interposition would counter-act Religion, which loses its Beauty and its Worth, when it has no Difficulties to overcome. In tracing the Steps of Providence, we are not therefore to expect certain and undeniable Evidence of its immediate Influence : It acts always under some Concealment, and makes use of Casualties and Accidents—the Changes and apparent Chances of this Life to attain its Ends ; by them it directs Mankind, protects the Good, and disappoints the Malice of their Enemies.

That in this Way Providence has often interfered to defend these Nations against Violence, more eminently still against Treachery, against Schemes of Mischief, deeply laid, and industriously cruel — it is but revolving some few Pages of their History to be abundantly convinced : Not one Instance of Distress appears in the whole Course of it, which has not proved in the Deliverance, an Instance of particular Protection : Not one, which has not been attended with some of those remarkable and amazing Incidents, which to a Mind serious
and

and considerate, distinctly prove the Interposition of the Deity. To enumerate particulars, howsoever proper to excite our Gratitude, is a task I shall at present not engage in : I have one before me better fitted to the Exigency of the Times, and, if I mistake not, still more eminently useful.

From infinite Wisdom nothing can proceed that has not its Source in Wisdom : God's Favours therefore cannot be dispensed in an arbitrary Manner; they are certainly distributed by Weight and Measure, and where they are particular — Reasons undoubtedly there are — particular Reasons also of unequal distribution. Capricious, and unsupported Preference of one Nation to another, none, who have just Notions of God's Attributes, will impute to Him. It is possible, the grounds of Preference may lie deep, out of the reach of human Penetration; but such there must be—such undeniably there must be; since Wisdom cannot make Distinctions, where no Differences are supposed.

In the Protection of the *Jews*, the pure Knowledge of one God was together with them protected; the Revelation of himself preserved; and the way laid for a better and a fuller. When these Ends were served, the particular Protection ceased—and that

that People, who, in the foregoing Revolutions, had been kept unbroken and entire by repeated and continual Wonders, was then left to the common Lot of Nations ; or rather made a standing Instance, that in the Punishment of Crimes God's Providence does likewise shew itself, and, provoked by an *obstinate and sinful People*, in that way also *manifests his Praise*.

Why these Nations have so long enjoyed that distinguished and remarkable Protection, plainly visible in so many Instances, is scarce a more difficult Inquiry. They, like the *Jews*, have been God's appointed Guardians to preserve valuable Truths ; to be his Witnesses to Mankind ; and testify by the Wonders he has wrought for them, that it is his Cause they are engaged in — a Cause, which he protects, and therefore certainly approves.

If we are just in our Evaluation, equitable and impartial, I am afraid our private Vices will be found upon Inquiry as many and as great as those of other Nations—our private Virtues in no degree superior : Nothing in the One, or in the Other, to support that favourable Preference, evidenced in so many Instances. In the defence of Liberty—of Civil and Religious Liberty—
In

In the warm and generous defence of it, We have been foremost among Nations : and I am not afraid to say, that, as far as we have light to judge of the Designs of God, so far we have reason to conclude, that upon this Account especially, probably indeed upon this Account alone, We have been, since the blessed Æra of the Reformation, *the Chosen People of the Lord, whom he has formed for himself—and to shew forth his Praise.*

Under different Forms of Government—in every Country upon Earth, Tyranny, and arbitrary Power have by Violence, or by Fraud prevailed : Here alone, confined within these narrow Bounds, Liberty has found a Refuge—Here with a noble, and a generous Ardor it has been cherished and imbraced—Here defended by the foremost Spirits of Mankind, who preferred every thing to Slavery ; a Death useful to their Country before the Bribes of Power. From this blessed Source all other Blessings are derived : Hence, and hence alone the Wealth—the Strength—the Prosperity of these Kingdoms. And is it not an End worthy of God's Providence, to protect them, as his standing Witnesses to future Ages, that in Liberty alone all National Blessings are included ? To declare
by

by their Preservation, that all those who generously court it, and dare for the Service of Mankind seek it among the greatest perils, them he will himself assist ?

Religious Liberty is still of more importance to Mankind; and peculiar to ourselves in a more distinguished manner even than the Other. To those low degrees of it, which obtain among our Neighbours, We have led the way by our Example; to the perfect Injoyment of it, none have made so near Approaches. The right of thinking freely, for however the Words have been abused to express a Prejudice against Religion, they in themselves mean nobly—the right of thinking freely, and of honestly discovering the Result of our Inquiries, is here more generally understood, more explicitly acknowledged, less invaded either by private or by public Censures, than in any part of the known World : It has here more Friends ; and fewer Enemies. And can any Man conceive, that God is not concerned to protect a People so happily distinguished ? among whom prevails a Spirit so favourable to Religion, without which—neither Practice, nor Persuasion, not the best Practice, nor the luckiest Persuasion—have any thing in them of Religion ? Where will he then admit

admit of Providence ? Is there any thing of equal Moment upon Earth, to deserve particular Protection ?

I am far from an Intention to assert, that on those Motives only God has interfered in the Protection of these Kingdoms. His Views are too extensive, to be peremptorily limited by the narrow Reach of our Conjectures. There may have been already, there may be in the Womb of Time, many secondary Ends to serve by their Preservation and Prosperity : But these are unsearchable to human Wisdom, and afford no Hold for our Hopes of future Favour. On the former Motives only, on those happy Distinctions I have mentioned between us and other Nations, our Confidence in God must be supported — On them it originally stands, and on them it must ultimately rest.

While these Distinctions last, that God will interfere in our Defence, his Wisdom, that varies not from its own Measures, is our Pledge and our Security. But should those honourable Grounds of Preference cease, or be abused, that his particular Protection will also be suspended, or withdrawn, as necessarily follows from the same unerring Wisdom.

God

God be praised ! They have not ceased. We are still free, and blest in the Injoyment of our Civil, and Religious Rights : But are they not abused ? Have we not equally in either Instance turned Liberty into Licentiousness ?

Religious Liberty, then only valuable when it serves the Purposes of Virtue and Religion, has it not degenerated by Degrees into an Indifference for Religion — I had almost said into an avowed Contempt of it ? The Right of thinking freely has it not been used, as if all Restraints, even those of Common Decency, were Incroachments and Violations of it ? As if thinking freely and prophanely were Synonymous Expressions ? Freedom of Inquiry — Unlimited Freedom of Inquiry, may it never be denied us — So wisheth every Man, who sincerely seeks for Truth. But is it rational, and unprejudiced Inquiry, which has given rise to those contemptible Performances, where the most important Concerns of Mankind are treated with a childish Levity ? Are they written, as if the Authors of them had any serious end in view ; either to instruct their Readers, or be themselves informed ? Or are they not visibly the Off-spring of Wantonness and Folly ?

Far



Far it be from me to desire, that Opinions once received as sacred should be sheltered from Objections ; Farther still, that the Right of Speaking freely of Religion, however unhappily abused, should be any ways abridged. To curb Licentiousness in this Case would destroy true Liberty along with it. But, sincerely could I wish, that the Cause of Liberty was not disgraced by this unmanly use of it ; that those engaged in its Defence upon rational and generous Principles, would declare their Contempt of such Associates, and testify by their Writings, and their Conversation, that Freedom of Inquiry is perfectly consistent with a deep, and serious Sense of Virtue, and Religion. X

In another Instance I could wish, that the real Friends of Liberty would make Proof by their Behaviour, that they know the value of the Rights they plead for ; that their Zeal has a more rational Foundation than mere Impatience of Restraint. The Right of worshipping Almighty God in the Way which best approves itself to our own Reason, is a sacred and unalienable Right : but, how consistently do we appear in its Defence, who live at the same time in an open, and avowed Contempt of every Office of Religion ? While Indifference

ference prevails to every public Act of Worship, while the Infection spreads, and invades successively every Rank of Men among us, how out of Place are Zeal, and Warmth for Liberty of Conscience? Should we not blush to undertake this glorious Cause, which cannot be maintained with Decency by any who are not seriously disposed to use the Privilege they claim, and zealously to render unto God their free and reasonable Service?

Civil Liberty — Has it not been equally abused? Has not the very Sense of it declined? Or has it not been unhappily perverted into a restless Spirit of Discontent, and Opposition? Is it not impaired among us, both in its Vigour, and its Purity?

If Patriotism and public Spirit, the genuine Source of Liberty, the only Source, from which it ever flowed in a full and a continuous Stream, has industriously been made the Scoff, and the By-word of the Age; marked out for the peculiar Object of Mirth and Ridicule; represented as a romantic Folly, which those who know the World have learned to despise; Is not the Cause of Liberty deeply and severely injured? Are not its Vitals wounded?
And

And the Principles erased, on which alone we can consistently exert ourselves in the manly and the generous Defence of it?

If in a more dangerous Extreme, the loudest Claim to Patriotism has at any time appeared to terminate in private Ends; If Clamours have successively been raised for the same Measures, and against them; excited first, and then appeased, without any Variation in their Object; more eminently still has the Cause of Liberty been injured. Pretences to public Spirit disgraced by an ungenerous Conduct, strike at the very Being of all Liberty, inevitably tend, directly and immediately, to the utter Extirpation of it. Should Times unhappily arise, when it will be of Importance to rouse the dormant Sense of it among the People, to alarm them against Encroachments on their most valuable Rights; this fatal, and degenerate Hypocrisy will encumber with Suspicions even then the laudable Attempt, and make the Task impracticable.

These Errors, should they unhappily prevail, would erase all Sense of Liberty. Other Errors, of less Malignity indeed, but however of destructive Tendency, have, I am afraid, perverted it.

From imperfect Notions of true Liberty, or from the secret Suggestions of Resentment, should it — from any Cause — be true, that the People has unwarily been taught to recur to the last Remedy, reserved for the most desperate Emergencies, and then only justifiable, when it is strictly necessary, to avowed Opposition, to Clamour, Violence, and undisguised Resistance to Authority, against Measures of a disputable Nature, possibly at least of distant and remote Expediency, certainly of intricate, and laborious Disquisition — Should this be true, is not Liberty become Licentiousness? Is not a Spirit raised which necessarily tends to the Destruction of all Government? Is not Society dissolved, which can subsist no longer; should the Legal Powers, acting legally, be dependent in the Execution of their Office on the Will of an unruly Populace? The last Appeal indeed is to the People— And when Rulers exceed their Powers, God forbid, that this Appeal should be considered as Licentiousness: God forbid, that from this Place, sacred to Truth, and Religion, any thing should be advanced to abridge the Rights of Mankind, and bind Slavery upon them under the awful Name of Submission to their God— The last Appeal is to the People; but the first Appeal is to the Laws, which

which they have a Right to vindicate, but not to silence.

In another Instance, if the Right of passing Judgment on the Conduct of our Governors has at any time been used with a settled Resolution, with an avowed, and a professed Intention of aggravating all Miscarriages — of disfiguring, or concealing all rational, and successful Measures, is not Liberty become Licentiousness? If, under the plausible Pretence of an attentive Watchfulness to prevent Encroachments on their Liberties, the Minds of the People have been poisoned with Jealousies and Fears; if, by the disingenuous Arts of Calumny, those Fears have been improved into Disgust, and by a pernicious Perseverance afterwards into a settled Disaffection, till the very Authors of the Evil could neither govern, nor allay it — If these Things have at any Time been so, is not such Liberty Licentiousness?

In the Name of Liberty! In the Name of that inestimable Treasure! Let us not thus shamefully disgrace it; nor give room any longer by our Conduct to those, who with Pleasure would defame it, to say with so much Show of Reason, that all Zeal for its Defence, is Petulance of Spirit only, and an unruly Heat of Temper.

The

The manly Spirit of true Liberty disdains Licentiousness, as much as it does Slavery ; is obedient to Virtue, Religion, and the Laws ; and impatient only of irrational Restraints. On this generous and noble Spirit — On what of it remains among us in its native Dignity and Lustre — On the Improvement of it, where it hitherto exerts itself but faintly or imperfectly — On the Revival of it, where it is extinguished — On this generous and noble Spirit depend all the Blessings we enjoy : On this Spirit they depend, as the natural and genuine Cause of them ; On this Spirit more eminently still do they depend, as our Pledge, and our Security of God's particular Protection. *Let the Kings of the Earth take Counsel, and the Rulers set themselves against us.* — Let the Enemies of Religion, and of Liberty, therefore Enemies to these happy Nations because they are the Guardians of them both — Let them rage and imagine a vain Thing : In a steady Dependance upon God, and in this unconquerable Spirit we shall find Strength to defeat all the Projects of Ambition. Nothing is impossible to a Free and a Religious People ; and however we are compassed about by our Enemies on every Side, *as a Fire of Thorns will they be*

be quenched : For the Lord taketh Part with them that help us ; the Lord is on our Side, we will not fear what Man can do unto us. —

Under this encouraging Persuasion, grounded on pregnant and on rational Presumptions, Let me exhort you, Brethren, to behave, in this present Time of Trial — As Protestants persuaded of the Truth of their Religion, and seriously attached to it — As Men born free, and generously resolved to die so. If thus we are determined — in the Defence of his sacred Majesty upon the Throne, and of his illustrious House, we must find Safety ; his Cause is itself the Cause of Liberty, and of Religion, inseparably united with it, essentially the same — Be it therefore our immoveable, our declared Resolution to defend his Person and his Government, as the dearest Pledges of our own Security and Happiness, at the Expence of our Fortunes—which are no longer ours, when the Exigencies of the State require them ; and at the Hazard of our Lives — which can never be so well bestowed, as in preserving to Posterity those Civil, and Religious Rights, which we received from our Forefathers : Let us give this generous Resolution all the Evidence it can receive : and by every Testimony

mony we can contrive, of our determined Choice to Sacrifice every Thing besides, that we hold dear, to the Support of his just and gracious Government, convince our Enemies, how delusive were the Hopes they had conceived, that a Free People tamely would resign their Liberty, and a Protestant People their Religion !

F I N I S.

